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# **‘Ethnic Belonging of the Children Born out of Rape in Post-Conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda’**

## **Abstract**

Sexual violence has been used as a weapon of war in ethnic conflicts, and forced impregnations have been central to this strategy. Scholars however disagree on whether the cultural assimilation to the maternal group influence these children’s identities, or whether they are perceived as belonging to the enemy group (Carpenter, 2010; Nikolic-Ristanovic, 1996). Drawing on preliminary qualitative findings collected in 2013 in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina, this paper analyses the ethnic identification imposed by the enemy group, the mothers and their community on the children born out of rape. It first explores how the mothers’ ethnic identities are often erased, imposing on their children the fathers’ ethnic background, and how this then justifies their social exclusion from their maternal ethnic group. This paper suggests that sexual violence is extremely effective in ensuring the continuation of the ethnic conflict in the aftermath of the violence by attacking the children’s senses of belonging.

## **Introduction**

Theories of gender and nationalism argue that nationalist discourses impose on women the role of the cultural reproducers of the nation, meaning that women are vulnerable to crimes of sexual violence in times of identity-based conflicts (Cockburn, 1998; Moghadam, 1994a; Zarkov, 2007). For instance, sexual violence has been extensively used as a weapon of war in ethnic conflicts, as it was the case during the Bosnian war (1992-95) and the Rwandan genocide (1994). In these cases, sexual violence was used as a tool to humiliate and destroy the enemy by targeting the ‘mothers of the nation’, and in order to destabilize or disintegrate the social cohesion of the enemy group. Forced impregnations have been central to this strategy, since they directly and biologically attack the enemy group’s reproduction and bloodline purity, so therefore its survival. This creates tensions in the aftermath of the conflict, when children born out rape possess necessarily conflictual ethnic identities.

Scholars have provided different theories on whether the ethnic identity of the survivors of sexual violence and the possibility of cultural assimilation to the mother’s group influence these children’s identity construction, or whether, instead, these children are perceived as belonging to the enemy group (Skjelsbaek and Smith, 2001). This paper contributes to this debate and analyses the ethnic identification of the children born out of war rape in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina from the perspective of the enemy groups, the mothers themselves, and the ethnic groups to which the mothers belong.

Drawing on ethnographic data collected in Rwanda and in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2013, this paper first engages with the scholarly views on the children’s ethnic identification, before analysing how the women’s ethnic identities were subordinated during the ethnic wars- identity

that labelled them as the enemy in the first place- based on a patriarchal understanding of women as passive recipients of the men's seeds. Second, this paper analyses how according to my respondents, this patriarchal understanding has influenced some women themselves, who accepted the removal of their identity and actively deny membership in their ethnic community to their child. The data collected suggests that unlike the enemy group and their ethnic community, the mothers are not necessarily imposing the ethnic identity of the enemy group on their child, but are instead imposing the violent identity of the father. Finally, this paper explores how this also justifies the social exclusion of some children from their maternal ethnic group and prevents them from being integrated to their mothers' culture, suspending them in an 'ethnic limbo'.

My ethnographic data therefore suggests that sexual violence is extremely effective in ensuring the continuation of the ethnic conflict in the aftermath of the violence, because some children born out of rape are actively denied membership into the mother's ethnic group, fostering the disintegration of ethnic communities.

## **Context**

It is widely accepted in the academic literature and by the international community that sexual violence was widely used during the Bosnian war (1992-95) and the Rwandan genocide (April-July 1994). In the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Bassiouni Report (1994), commissioned by the United Nations regarding the use of rape in Yugoslavia, reported that sexual violence was widely used by all sides, both on men and women, but that the largest numbers of rapes were committed by Bosnian Serbs against Muslims (Bassiouni Report, 1994: 60). Moreover, whilst it is agreed that some perpetrators acted on their own initiative, there were

similarities in the overall pattern of sexual violence that suggested that a systematic rape policy was implemented in some areas (Bassiouni Report, 1994: 60). The evidence recorded not only suggests that sexual violence was used as a weapon for ethnic cleansing during the Bosnian war (with an estimation of 20,000 to 60,000 rapes), but also that this practice was highly organised (Skjelsbaek and Smith, 2001: 53-4).

As for the Rwandan genocide (1994), some sources estimate the number of rapes between 250,000 and 500,000 (Hudson, 2010: 264; United Nations, 1998: section 3.10). Moreover, 15,700 cases of raped women and hundreds forced pregnancies during the genocide were recorded by the Ministry for the Family and the Promotion of Women (United Nations, 1996b). These numbers however clearly underestimate the reality of sexual violence since they do not take into consideration the reluctance of men and women to admit that they were sexually abused by fear of social rejection. However, because the number of rapes may become an extremely powerful tool for political propaganda, the exact figures for rapes might never be known. And yet, according to international organisations such as Human Rights Watch, almost every Tutsi woman who survived the genocide suffered from sexual violence (Skjelsbaek and Smith, 2001).

### **The scholarly debate**

Theories of gender and nationalism argue that nationalist discourses tend to attribute specific gender roles and symbols. As Mosse (1985) explains, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalist discourses started to use female symbols to represent the nation. Many female figures, such as Marianne (France), Britannia (Great-Britain) and Germania (Germany), were created in order to personify the nation. All of these figures were used to unite the population under a

collective/national sense, but also to represent the national values. By choosing chaste, modest and respectable female symbols of the nation, the nationalist ideology promoted the superiority of the nation, but also imposed on women the role of embodying the nation's respectability. Whether the female figures are Marianne or Mother Russia, they are all used to symbolise the nation and to impose gender roles within the society (Cockburn, 1998; Enloe, 1990; Mertus, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997).

Moreover, the female embodiment of the nation and its impact on the imposition of gender roles within the society serve the purpose of distinguishing between the insiders and outsiders of the nation. As Mertus (1994) points out, nationalism involves a process of selecting who is part of the nation and who is not. Since the limits of this imagined community cannot be visually drawn, myths of common origin, destiny and national values are used to distinguish between the national insiders and outsiders. Women as symbols of the nation are holding a specific position within the society, which is to embody this imaginary border between the nation's insiders and outsiders. This dichotomy between "Our Women" and the "Enemy/Other Women" are central to the process of nation-building. As Yuval-Davis (1994: 413) mentions,

gender divisions often play a central organizing role in specific constructions of ethnicity, marking ethnic boundaries and reproducing ethnic difference. (...) The "proper" behaviour of women is often used to signify the difference between those who belong to the collectivity and those who do not.

The construction of the "Other", often necessary to the emergence of a sense of national identity, is therefore closely associated with the constructions of gender occurring in that same collectivity (Milic, 1993; Moghadam, 1994b).

Theories of gender and nationalism explain the use of female figures to symbolize the nation because of their maternal position within the society. Women are perceived as mothers of

the nation, whose roles are to reproduce the values and culture of the national or ethnic group (Cockburn, 1998; Enloe, 1990; Zarkov, 2007). Whether it is through family attachment or maternal roles, women are assigned the responsibility of group reproduction by the nationalist ideology by ensuring that future generations are both biologically and symbolically members of the nation (Moghadam, 1994a; Zarkov, 2007). This role of cultural reproducers of the nation becomes increasingly important when the group identity intensifies or when the nation feels threatened by another group (Yuval-Davis, 1994). In these contexts, women as mothers and wives become politicized and are instructed to participate into the nationalist agenda by producing more members of the nation, and by conserving the nation's purity, while men are expected to defend it (Cockburn, 1998; Enloe, 1990; Milic, 1993). This does also mean that when violence erupts between national or ethnic groups, women are increasingly vulnerable to sexual abuse by the enemy group (Moghadam, 1994b; Yuval-Davis, 1997).

Wartime rape is currently explained by four leading theories: the feminist theory, the cultural pathology theory, the biosocial theory and the strategic rape theory (Gottschall, 2004). First, the feminist theory was developed by scholars such as Susan Brownmiller (1975), who suggest that wartime rape is a crime perpetuated by men against women, in order to keep women into a state of fear and subordination. Second, the cultural pathology theory (Mackinnon, Chang, Rosenman) argues that wartime rape can be understood by looking at the development of the nation's culture throughout history in order to determine the factors that led to a culture of violence against women, whilst the biosocial theory (Thornhill & Palmer, Ghiglieri) moves away from cultural factors to argue that wartime rape is motivated by individual sexual desire. According to this latter theory, soldiers would engage in acts of sexual violence to respond to their individual needs or as a reward for their acts. All these theories explain to a certain extent

the use of sexual violence in wars. For example, it cannot be denied that a power structure between men and women is reproduced through wartime sexual violence, and that some individuals will engage in acts of sexual violence to respond to their individual sex desire. For example, Baaz and Stern's research (2009) demonstrates that the FARDC soldiers they interviewed in the DRC engaged in acts of sexual violence for reasons associated with sexual lust ('lust rapes') and with the desire to humiliate ('evil rapes'), both intertwined with issues of poverty and suffering. Based on these accounts, rapes were not committed as a result of "Othering" or for national security purpose. Whilst this may certainly explain why individuals in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda committed crimes of sexual violence, this paper suggests that a process of "Othering" and of biological reproduction of the ethnic groups were at the core of the policy of mass rape. The scale and organisation of these acts during both conflicts suggest a systematic pattern of sexual violence that was used as a weapon of war.

This paper therefore supports the argument that in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda, sexual violence was used as a weapon of war to accomplish certain objectives in armed conflicts (the strategic rape theory). Strategic rape theory (Thomas & Regan, Allen, Littlewood) suggests that in the episodes of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina and genocide in Rwanda, sexual violence was used to humiliate and to destroy the culture of the enemy group by targeting the victim's identity (Mertus, 2000; Skjelsbaek, 2012). In these cases, rape was part of a military strategy of attacking the "Other" through his women- the symbol and cultural reproducers of his nation- and women were raped not only because of their gender identity, but mostly because they represented the "ethnic Other" (Allen, 1998; Morokvasic, 1998). Furthermore, since rape is used to humiliate both the victim and her ethnic community, sexual violence against the nation's



women can therefore not be perceived in these cases as solely crimes against individuals, but also as crimes against the whole nation (Hague, 1997; Morokvasic, 1998).

This is an argument that was also discussed with by the women I met in both Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda. For example, Daliya (Bosnia-Herzegovina, 8 November 2013) mentioned:

I was raped because of my nationality. They, Serbs, wanted to destroy Bosniaks. I cannot say that Bosniaks didn't rape other women, but it is a minority. Serbs wanted to overtake the Eastern part of Bosnia and they did not choose a weapon. In fact, women were the strongest weapon.

A similar narrative was also expressed in Rwanda, but the focus on sexual violence as a weapon of war was not as strong. Instead, there was a strong focus on the ethnic component of the war, with the women saying that they were raped because of their Tutsi identity. 'They said they wanted to see how a Tutsi vagina looks like' (Valentine, 29 May 2013). The women I met acknowledged the presence of other factors, such as lust to explain the rapes experienced, but they still understood these crimes as part of the ethnic cleansing's strategy.

The forced impregnation of enemy women is another important component of sexual violence as a weapon of war when the nation is being defined in organic terms (Lentin, 1997). As explained by Nikolic-Ristanovic (1996: 202),

[this strategy] comes from a very deep patriarchal construction that women passively accept men's seed and do not add anything original to it. Thus the identity of the child, the identity if a human being, depends only on men; consequently, women impregnated by their enemies give birth to children who belong to the enemy's ethnic group.

This idea is however criticized by others. Allen (1996) suggests that the Serb soldier who believes that with enforced pregnancies he is creating a 'little Chetniks' is mistaken. She argues that not only in terms of biology will the child possess attributes of both Serbs and Bosniaks, but

in terms of culture the child will be integrated into the culture in which s/he is raised, which is often that of the mother. As she notes, 'to call such children 'Chetniks' or 'little Serb soldiers' is clearly a blatant, though highly motivated, stupidity' (Allen, 1996: 97). This is supported by Helms (2013: 68), who suggests that in Bosnia-Herzegovina,

children of rape were likely to be raised either as adoptees or orphans who were unaware of their origins or as members of their mothers' ethnic group and believers in her faith rather than to be determined solely by the genetic input of the rapists, social stigma notwithstanding.

This paper seeks to contribute to these opposing views by suggesting that the individual perceptions of some women who experienced sexual violence and some NGOs staff members demonstrate a complex situation that nuances the theoretical claims mentioned above. Based on my own data, I argue that a patriarchal understanding of group reproduction influenced the war strategies in both contexts, and that by impacting the ethnic belonging of the children born out of rape, sexual violence is perceived by my respondents as being effective in ensuring the continuation of the conflict by fostering the disintegration of communities in the aftermath of the violence.

## **Methods**

The ethnographic data analysed in this paper was collected in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina over a period of seven months in 2013 (four months spent intensively with the NGOs and the women), and represents a specific sub-section of a larger mixed methods project on the social reintegration of the women who experienced wartime sexual violence in post-conflict societies. My time spent in Rwanda included participant observation of five grassroots and international non-governmental organisations working with survivors of the genocide in

Kigali and in the Eastern province. During my time with these organisations, I conducted in-depth interviews with ten women survivors of sexual violence and 16 non-governmental organisations' staff members. The narratives of the survivors of sexual violence during the genocide all come from Tutsi women aged between 35-70 years old, who are members of a survivors' organisation and live in different regions of Rwanda. I however engaged in non-formal interviews with around 30 survivors, attending counselling sessions, income-generating activities sessions, follow-up health meetings, etc.

When I was in Bosnia-Herzegovina, I observed the work done by five grassroots organisations working with mothers, widows and survivors of sexual violence from the Bosnian war. These organisations were located in Sarajevo and in another municipality in the centre of the country. I then engaged in in-depth interviews with seven women survivors of sexual violence, and eight non-governmental organisations' staff members. The survivors of sexual violence include women of 36-60 years old, who are all members of a women's organisation, all identify as Bosnian Muslims and come from different regions of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Throughout my fieldwork, I also engaged in non-formal interviews with around 20 survivors of sexual violence, attending income-generating activities sessions.

All women interviewed in both places were chosen based on their past experience of wartime sexual violence, and because of their affiliation to a NGO, in order to limit the ethical risks. Interviewing women active in the NGOs ensured that they had access to psychological support in case of psychological distress during the interviews, and provided me access to these women without having to directly contact them, perhaps putting them at risk of having the truth about their past known in their community. NGOs were also chosen due to their geographical location, reputation in the country and their inclusion of survivors of sexual violence. All staff members

interviewed have expertise on working with women who were impregnated as a result of the rape and have worked with these women, but not all staff members were regularly working with these mothers at the time of the research.

Of all the survivors I conducted formal interviews with, only one respondent in Rwanda did stay in proximity of where she was living during the genocide, with all the other women attempting to rebuild their lives outside their hometown. This survivor is also the only survivor who openly discussed her child born out of rape. I informally met 50 survivors, but only one woman who had a child born out of rape agreed to be interviewed, and one another who had an abortion resulting from the rape. I met other women who either had children born out of rape or abortion resulting from the rape but they were uncomfortable with being interviewed. However, all women discussed this issue of having children born out of rape, even if it did not happen to them. This suggests that there is a clear distinction between suffering from rape and being impregnated from this rape. Whilst this clearly limits the representativeness of the data collected, these methodological limitations are extremely revealing of the stigmatisation and marginalisation experienced by the survivors of sexual violence- especially those who had a child born out of rape- that might prevent them from being comfortable to speak about their past. However, it is worth clarifying that this paper does not aim at analysing the perceptions of the mothers themselves. Instead, the purpose of this paper is to analyse the perceptions that some women who experienced sexual violence and some NGOs staff members have on this situation, analysing how this might contribute to the stigmatisation of the children born out of rape and their mothers. The data collected should therefore be understood as the individual perceptions of some women who experienced sexual violence and had subsequently joined a NGO, and NGOs staff members that I met during my fieldwork period in these two countries, providing an original

contribution to research on this topic due to its focus on the community perspectives and its comparison of cases studies.

Finally, the identity of the survivors of sexual violence, NGO's staff members and organisations are protected in this paper. It is also worth noting that when discussing the case study of Bosnia-Herzegovina this article tends to focus on the use of rape by Serbian soldiers against Bosnian Muslim women, but that sexual violence was used by all sides during the Bosnian war of 1992-1995. The same reasoning is applicable for the case of Rwanda, where whilst the largest numbers of crimes of sexual violence were committed against Tutsi women, Hutu and Twa also suffered from sexual violence. The women included in this research however all identified as Bosnian Muslims or Tutsi, which may reveal the reluctance of Bosnian Serbs or Bosnian Croats, as well as Hutu women to join survivors' organisations because of their identities.

It is also worth noting that it is currently forbidden in Rwanda to identify as part of one ethnic group (Mgbako, 2005). However, based on fieldwork conducted in the summer of 2013, it is evident that ethnic identification is still occurring at the individual level. These group identifications are not necessarily based on hatred, but instead seem to be based on a sharing of experiences. As expressed by a Rwandan woman (10 June 2013), 'there are not any tensions between these groups, but people have the tendency to regroup with others who share the same experiences from the genocide, so they tend to stay with those of the same group.' Identification with individuals who shared the same experiences during the genocide is another form of ethnic identification, since individuals who identified as part of the same ethnic group in 1994 tend to have experienced similarly the genocide. Of course, individual experiences may differ, but based on my time spent in Rwanda, a certain sense of separation between returnees (Tutsi in exile

during the genocide), those granted the title of survivors by the government (Tutsi), and those who identified as Hutu or Twa still exist in Rwanda today. Whilst this separation is not based on ethnicity, a certain ethnic homogeneity within each group is still observable.

### **Reproducing the ethnic cleansing in the aftermath of the conflict**

The identification imposed by the enemy group, the mothers and the local community on the children born out of rape will be discussed in three sections: the removal of the mothers' ethnic identity during the ethnic cleansing, the imposition of the father's violent identity on the children by the mothers, and finally the social exclusion and stigma experienced by the children born out of rape from their government and maternal community.

#### *Kill the men, rape the women*

In both conflicts, the aim was the physical destruction of the enemy group, and it is estimated that around 100,000 individuals were killed during the Bosnian war and that around 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu were cleansed in Rwanda (Mann, 2004: 356, 430). However, the vast majority of the victims remain men. For instance, it is understood in Rwanda that there are not enough male survivors of the genocide for every female Rwandans to find a husband (observation of Organisation 4, 10 June 2013). Moreover, data from the *Bosnian Book of the Dead* (2013) show a clear gender divide in the casualties.

**Table 1. Casualties from the Bosnian war, 1992-1995.**

<b>Role\Gender</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>Civilians</b>	30,317	9,367
<b>Combatants</b>	57,134	389
<b>Total</b>	87,451	9,756

Source: Toal, G. and Dahlman, C.T. (2011). *Bosnia Remade : Ethnic Cleansing and its Reversal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 136.

However, in a context where the destruction of the enemy is the aim, one can wonder why the women were spared? I argue that the practices of ethnic cleansing found in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda were gendered, and that women were not inevitably killed since in the eyes of the enemy group, women were not reproducers of their ethnic group without their ethnic men.

This understanding of women as passive recipients of the men's seeds had the effect of erasing women as ethnic individuals and as individuals of social value without their ethnic men, and was clearly observed through the use of rape as a strategy of war. For instance, in Bosnia-Herzegovina some camps emerged during the war, with the main purpose of systematically raping women over a long period of time (Skjelsbaek and Smith, 2001: 5). Many survivors of sexual violence I met in Bosnia-Herzegovina went through these camps:

Very soon, the Serbs took me to the camp with a lot of other women. Some of them [the women] were my cousins and cousins of my husband. I was there for seven months and half. In that period I didn't see my daughter or mother, and I couldn't hear anything about my husband. The Serb soldiers were torturing us, we were raped, beaten... (Emina, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 14 November 2013).

These camps also had the purpose of impregnating Bosnian women with Serbian children (Allen, 1996; Skjelsbaek and Smith, 2001; West, 2005). For instance, the slogan of the Serbian policy of mass rape was ‘You will give birth to a Chetnik soldier’ (Meznaric, 1994: 77).

The use of rape and the strategy of forced impregnation of Muslim women could suggest that in the eyes of the Serbian army, the ethnic identity of the Muslim women was second when reproducing with a non-Muslim man- based on a patrilineal understanding of ethnicity. Whilst scholars such as Allen (1996) and Helms (2013) refute this as pure ignorance since it does not take into account the biological characteristics of the mothers or the possibility for cultural assimilation, the fact remains that the policy of ethnic cleansing found during the Bosnian war was based on this patriarchal understanding of lineage which saw women as passive recipients of the men’s seed.

This patriarchal understanding emerged from the pre-existing gender norms of the Bosnian society, where the men are perceived as the head of the household, and as having a more prominent position within the society (Milic, 1993; Morokvasic, 1998). As described by Adna, a clinical psychologist (Bosnia-Herzegovina, 6 November 2013), ‘in our country, the roles of men and women are very well known. The woman is at home, raise the children, cook and clean.’ Since the immediate pre-war gender norms already devaluated the position of women within the society, it laid the grounds for a policy of mass rape and forced impregnations that subordinated the ethnic identity of the women, identity that made them the enemy in the first place. This could explain why many women were allowed to live for a long period of time in camps, instead of being killed. ‘[I spent] four years of suffering, being raped, separated from my family, living in camps with no food or water...’ (Dalija, 8 November 2013).



The same patriarchal understanding that Tutsi women could not continue the reproduction of their group without their ethnic men was also present in Rwanda, which can explain to a certain extent why more women than men were allowed to survive the genocide. For instance, throughout my fieldwork period in Rwanda, it became evident that many women survived the genocide only because the *Interahamwe* decided to spare their lives. This is the case of Céline (5 June 2013):

At 2 am I saw people coming among us lighting on our faces and asking papers, I was spared that night. At 9 am in the morning, a little boy came to tell me that some people wanted to see me. I asked who were they? He didn't want to tell but I didn't have a choice. I followed him but I told my children to come with me. When we got there I found out that they were soldiers on a roadblock. They asked me to enter in the house alone. When I got inside they raped me. When they finished what they were doing to me, they asked me where I was from. I told them that I was from Kibuye. They let me go.

However, of the more than 30 survivors of sexual violence I talked to during my time in Rwanda, the vast majority were widows, meaning that there was clearly a gender divide between those who were spared and those who were undoubtedly killed.

Moreover, some women were allowed to survive when forced into sexual slavery. 'Days later, one of them [*Interahamwe*] took me at his house and raped me. I spent a week there. Every day he used to go kill people during the day and come back at night bringing others like me.' (Jeannette, 9 July 2013). For some women, such as Céline, accepting to become the "wife" (i.e. sexual partner) of an *Interahamwe* was a deliberate "choice" in order to seek protection:

We were too many hidden by him, every time he went to kill people, we stayed hidden. (...) They [the community] found out about us because they were asking themselves how we survived someone who killed many people. But because we were hiding in the bushes and lands before we got to hide with that *Interahamwe*, people we left behind didn't like us anymore because they knew we got rescued by the same killers who were hunting them (Céline, 26 June 2013).

All of these testimonies demonstrate that during the mass killings of April to July 1994 in Rwanda, some women were allowed to live and instead suffered from crimes of sexual violence, suggesting that the genocide was clearly gendered.

*'He eats like a killer'*

According to my respondents and ethnographic presence in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda, a clear psychological consequence of the policy of mass rape is that these women accepted the removal of their identity. My participants suggested that unlike the enemy group and their ethnic community, some mothers are perhaps not necessarily imposing the ethnic identity of the enemy group on their child, but are instead imposing the violent identity of the father (i.e. rapist and killer), removing their own identity in the process.

First, many women decided to terminate their pregnancy (whether it was under safe or unsafe medical conditions), or to commit infanticide or suicide. 'I found out that I was pregnant from *Interahamwe*. It was bad for me. My wounds were treated and after I regained my strength, *Inkotanyi* [Rwandan Patriotic Front] made me have an abortion' (Oda, 2 July 2013). Whilst it cannot be assumed that these women terminated their pregnancy because they perceived their child as belonging to the enemy group, this however demonstrates the complexity of accepting (in this case by the mother and the *Inkotanyi*) a pregnancy that was forced upon them. 'It was hard for me to get pregnant of a child you didn't plan and from someone you don't know.' (Jeannette, 9 July, 2013). The desire of some women to terminate their pregnancy led many women's organisations to start providing medical and gynaecological assistance. 'Some women (...) came (...) with their pregnancy, the pregnancy was a result of the war rape, and they wanted to break that pregnancy, and some of our doctors helped them regarding their abortion' (President

of Organisation 10, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 19 November 2013). However, not all women decided or could terminate their pregnancy, and a few women did give birth to a child born out of rape.

Coming to terms with the pregnancy did not necessarily mean that the women accepted the child as their own. Many women decided to give their children up to adoption. As mentioned by Adna (Clinical Psychologist, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 6 November 2013), 'according to official information, women who stayed pregnant from the rapist, in most cases gave up the child at birth. Rare are the ones who have kept these children. They don't talk about it, and it is very reasonable.' Some women also decided to send their child to live with distant family members in order to avoid being associated with him/her.

In our culture, rape is like a taboo, so the mothers were most of them hiding the fact that they had children born from rape. They did not want to be associated with their children and as a result most of them took their children to live with some relatives so that people did not ask the mother "whose child is this?", and such things' (Program Manager, Organisations 1 and 2, Rwanda, 23 May 2013).

This quote also suggests that this decision is influenced by the gender norms found in Rwanda, where rape is considered shameful and women may face stigmatisation. As described by an aid worker in Rwanda (23 May 2013), 'there is a big stigma associated with having a child outside of marriage. And that's in all of society, but then the rape is an added thing. (...) I think it's pretty much if you have been raped, you have been spoiled.' The gender norms foster the continuation of the conflict in the aftermath of the violence by ensuring that the stigma and shame associated with forced impregnation may motivate some women to abandon their child, which fosters the disintegration of the ethnic community. And as for those who kept their offspring and decided to raise him, my respondents believe that the child becomes the embodiment of the trauma and violence experienced, explaining why the father's identity as a rapist and killer is attributed to the children born out of rape, over the ethnic identity.

My respondents claimed that some women who had children born out of rape are finding it difficult to perceive their child in another way than the son/daughter of a killer. As mentioned by the Program Manager of Organisation 3 (Rwanda, 4 June 2013), ‘those women come and say "when I look at my child, I see the killer of my husband. I see the killer of my parents. I hate that child. I don't even want to give him food. When he eats, it's like he is the killer. He eats like a killer."' This was also reported by staff members of other organisations who also mentioned that some mothers are unable at first to conceive a future for their child, and intentionally exclude them from the community: ‘there are some women who after giving birth to their child, did not want to love their child’ (Psychologist, Organisation 1, Rwanda, 13 May 2013), and ‘in the first place they used to hate their children, used to beat them, used to abuse them. They were saying "I'm like this because of you, because of your father."' (Psychologist, Organisation 3, Rwanda, 18 June 2013).

These narratives share some similarities with the identification of children born out of peacetime rape. For instance, many mothers impregnated through peacetime rape also face the challenges of loving and accepting a child that was conceived out of a violent act and who possesses attributes of the rapist (Solomon, 2013). As mentioned by a rape survivor who had a daughter resulting from rape: ‘Half of her genes are evil. (...). I can do whatever I should as her mom to make her this loving, wonderful, caring person. But in her is the DNA of a person who is really sick, and is that DNA stronger than what I can do?’ (Solomon, 2013: 482). In both wartime and peacetime cases, the father’s violent identity is imposed at various degrees on the children born out of rape. In cases of ethnic conflicts, this violent identity does not resume itself to the act of sexual violence, since the father was also involved in the killings of the survivor’s family and community.

Moreover, what is specifically distinct of forced impregnations in ethnic conflicts is that national/ethnic identities are at the core of the conflict, meaning that new-born babies are not perceived as sole individuals, but more importantly as members of an ethnic/national community. In this context, giving birth to a child whose father belongs to the enemy group is a traumatic experience for some women, which can perhaps explain why some of them impose the father's violent identity on the child, sometimes completely removing their own identity in the process. In these cases, it was suggested that the children are often perceived as a constant reminder of the past and embody the trauma experienced by the women.

I could even stand in the middle of the road hoping that a car would kill me, crying day and night. I tried to kill myself many times. I never loved that child because every time I see her, she reminds me of the past. She is my wound which will never heal. But slowly it may pass. I never told her about her father (Jeannette, 9 July 2013).

This is different to patrilineal beliefs of the father's identity prevailing, since in these cases the father's identity is not only prevailing, but is the only identity that some mothers ascribe to their children. For example, I met a few couples of mixed identities during my time in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and they all agreed that their children, whilst possessing attributes of both groups, were legally registered as being of the ethnicity of the father. This represents this patrilineal understanding of group reproduction, but these couples did not ignore the mother's identity in the child. My respondents perceive this as the main difference between children born of mixed couples and those born of rape, where in the latter cases some mothers totally erase their own identity and only ascribe the father's violent identity to the child.

Moreover, according to my respondents, cultural assimilation to the mother's group is impossible since some mothers are excluding the child and denying him/her membership to their group. This denial of membership to the maternal ethnic/national community means that these

children are often being denied equal opportunities compared to other children, such as access to education, as a way to hide the truth about their origin to the community. Fieldwork conducted in both contexts demonstrated that more than 18 years after the end of each conflict, some mothers' perceptions of their children born out of rape remain a challenge that needs to be addressed. However, some women have still developed positive relationships with their offspring and according to the Program Manager of Organisations 1 and 2 (Rwanda, 23 May 2013), it is through intense counselling and by providing educational opportunities to the children that the mothers might start to love and accept their children as their own.

Some [children] have had an opportunity to feel that they are equal with the other kids, because the mother now does not look at that child as the child of a killer. Why? She sees that this child is getting a future by getting education. She says "this child will take of me when I'm old". When this child gets education, he will be important for society. [...] Now the mother is seeing the child as a responsible person in the future, not as an outcast anymore.

This is consistent with research conducted by Medica Zenica (2014:88), where the two women interviewed who had a child born out of rape developed over time a close relationship with their child, and with the study by Erjavec and Volcic (2010) in which the children born out of rape in Bosnia-Herzegovina had close ties with their mothers. It will take time for some mothers to accept their children born out of rape as individuals who have an identity independent from their father, and it was argued that external support is needed. This could be deemed as respondent bias, in which the staff members interviewed suggest that external support is needed in order to justify their work. The women I spoke to also mentioned the importance of joining an organisation, but again all of these women are already members of one organisation. It would therefore be important for further research to discuss with women who have not joined an association and analyse whether they have also achieved close relationships with their child born out of rape, regardless of the external support provided.

### *Denial of ethnic belonging*

Finally, my respondents believe that some children born out of rape face social exclusion in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina due to the reluctance of the government and the community to accept them as victims of the war or members of the ethnic group. Again, they first explain this purely by their origin- being children born out of the marriage bonds and from the violence of rape- but also because the children are being imposed the ethnic identity of their father.

First, in the former Yugoslavia, in cases where parents possessed mixed identities, it was the father's identity that was being transmitted to the children, subordinating the mother's nationality (Allen, 1996; Skjelsbaek and Smith, 2001). Based on my fieldwork conducted in Bosnia-Herzegovina and my respondents, this tradition of keeping the father's identity is still present, as described previously. This can make it extremely hard for the children born out of rape to secure their place within the society, and this is perhaps first observed by the reluctance of the government to consider these children as victims of the war, and to provide them services. As Bakira, survivor of rape and President of a women's organisation mentioned (11 November 2013), 'the child does not have any rights from the state. [There are] no programs, the state has no strategy for such children.' This lack of recognition by the government means that the children born out of rape and their mothers find themselves without organised support, but also suggests that they form a category of war victims that remain alienated by the government. This is quite surprising since in the aftermath of the ethnic conflict, religious leaders encouraged the Muslim community to accept these children as their own (Carpenter, 2010). It does however seem that these words were not followed by concrete actions from the Bosnian authorities.

Furthermore, it was clear during my time spent in Bosnia-Herzegovina that most women who had children born out of rape did not join women organisations. My respondents perceived this as the women choosing to keep their past secret. Many respondents also believe that women who had children resulting from the rape did not return to Bosnia-Herzegovina after the war in order to avoid stigmatisation. Of course, this stigmatisation is also experienced by the women who experienced sexual violence, which is why some women without children I met are hoping to leave the country: 'If I could take my family with me outside of this country, I would go. I was offered to go, but only me... I didn't accept' (Dalija, 8 November 2013). However, these women also believe that they would receive more organised services and support abroad than in Bosnia-Herzegovina. 'I would like our government to give us more support, so that we are put into the law to get health care, to be socially secured. (...) The brother of my husband told us that we would get everything we need, if we went to live in Australia' (Sajra, 14 November 2013). It does seem paradoxical that survivors of sexual violence and the children born out of rape would get more services abroad than in their own country, but this might be revealing of the unease of the government to accept and recognise the rights of the children born out of rape, and a reflection of the wider gender norms of the Bosnian society.

A certain reluctance from the government to recognise the rights of the children born out of rape is also observed in Rwanda. The Rwandan government has established a monetary fund (FARG) that provides financial compensation and assistance to the survivors of the genocide. However, as confirmed by two staff members in Organisation 1 and 2 (13 May 2013), in order to be covered by this fund, one has to be an individual who identified as Tutsi and lived in Rwanda during the genocide. As for the children, they are also entitled to the title and assistance for survivors as long as they were born before December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1994. Based on these criteria, children



born out of rape are excluded from this financial assistance and from the title of survivors, since they were born in 1995. This lack of recognition is a problem experienced by the survivors of sexual violence themselves, as explained by Jeannette (9 July 2013): ‘another problem [I have] is when I think about her [child born out of rape] future because no one will help me to educate her because even FARG can’t support her because of who she is.’ Women and survivors organisations in Rwanda are lobbying the government to modify these criteria in order to recognise the rights and needs of the children born out of rape. This perhaps reflects the unease of the Rwandan government to accept and help children whose fathers were *génocidaires*, removing again the mothers’ identities in the process. The data collected therefore illustrate a complex situation where the children are being excluded from their maternal community, and where the central governments are reluctant to accept them as full members of the society. This reluctance might be a reflection of the wider gender norms found in both societies, where despite the contextual differences, specific gender norms and expectations are socially imposed- for instance the protection of girls’ virginity in Rwanda and the gendered division of labour in Bosnia-Herzegovina- and demonstrates that both governments share this patriarchal understanding of group reproduction.

My participants also mentioned that this exclusion from the government is also occurring at the community level, where children born out of rape face stigmatisation. The data collected suggest that children are perceived as belonging to the “Other”, and face exclusion from their family and ethnic community. As the counsellor of Organisation 4 said (Rwanda, 11 June 2013), ‘for example those ones who were born from *Interahamwe*, the mother can hide [the truth] but others shout at him: “*icyana cy’interahamwe*” [son of *Interahamwe*]. He feels rejected by a family he thinks he is from.’ Other staff members supported this, arguing that these children are

often rejected by their mother's family, and do not hold any status within the community. Some children are in a limbo, where they are not allowed to develop a sense of belong to their mother's community, but are also not belonging to their father's group. 'We say "the *Interahamwe*", we say the "children of the killers", we say "the children of these women", so they are children that have no status in the community. But it still depends from one individual to another' (Psychologist, Rwanda, 13 May 2013). Allen (1996) was partly right in suggesting that Serbian soldiers are mistaken when believing that the children born out of rape will belong to their ethnic group. As explained previously, the children are imposed the identity of their father by their own community, but are not integrated into the father's community. Their membership denial to the mother's community is not being replaced by membership to the father's ethnic group; they possess the ethnic attributes of two groups, and yet do not fully belong to either.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, this paper contributes to the scholarly views on the ethnic identification of the children born out of rape and provides an analysis of the individual interpretations of some women who experienced wartime sexual violence and some NGOs' staff members in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda. The data collected highlight a complex situation that is not always grasped by theoretical arguments. It suggests that some children born out of rape are imposed the identity of their father by the enemy group, the mothers themselves and the maternal ethnic community, subordinating the mother's identity in the process. This patriarchal understanding of women as passive recipient of the men's seeds was at the core of the mass policy of rape and forced impregnation of women in both ethnic conflicts, but is reproduced through the social

exclusion of some children born out of rape, effectively subtracting the mother's identity before, during and after the conflict.

My own data suggests that the war strategies implemented in both contexts had the effect of subordinating women's ethnic and social identities, influenced by this patriarchal understanding of group reproduction where women cannot reproduce their ethnic group without their ethnic men. Based on my respondents and their interpretations of the situation in both places, this patriarchal understanding also led some women in the aftermath of the conflict to impose on their children the violent identity of their father, i.e. the aggressor, denying them membership and assimilation to the mother's group. Finally, my respondents also believe that this same identification is also done by the family, ethnic community and to a certain extent government of the mothers. According to them, many children born out of rape are perceived as the "Other", as children who do not belong to the mother's group, and whose rights are not recognised by the government. This social exclusion prevents them from culturally assimilating to their mother's group, and their removal from the father's ethnic group ensure that some children currently remain in an ethnic limbo, where they possess characteristics of both ethnic groups, and yet are denied a sense of belonging to either of them.

Whilst there are contextual differences between BiH and Rwanda (gender norms and ethnic identification for example), my respondents share similar perceptions on the situation of some children born out of rape, suggesting that in both places the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war is extremely effective in ensuring the disintegration of ethnic communities in the aftermath of the violence, by attacking the children's identities and senses of belonging with their ethnic communities.

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